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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000812

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DEPT FOR SA/INS, S/CT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/29/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: PRO-LTTE JOURNALIST MURDERED IN COLOMBO

REF: A. COLOMBO 0789

[B](#). COLOMBO 0786

Classified By: CHARGE' D'AFFAIRES A.I. JAMES F. ENTWISTLE. REASON: 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (U) Just one week after the abduction of a Colombo-area police inspector (Ref A), Dharmaretnam Sivaram (aka "Taraki"), a renowned Tamil journalist, was abducted from in front of a Colombo restaurant (and across the street from a police station) by unidentified assailants late April 28. According to reports, he had been meeting with two Sinhalese trade union activists and a journalist for a Sinhala-language publication at the restaurant--one of Sivaram's favorite haunts--when he received a call on his cell phone and went outside. According to eyewitnesses, he was pushed into a gray SUV by four assailants. His body was found early April 29 in a lake behind the Parliament building. He had reportedly been shot in the face and/or severely beaten around the head. As of mid-day April 29, the results of the post-mortem were still pending.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Well known to the Embassy, Sivaram was a journalist and military analyst for the English-language "Daily Mirror," as well as a founder/editorial board member of TamilNet, the pro-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) website. A former member of the anti-LTTE paramilitary People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), he began his career as a freelance journalist reporting on the Tamil nationalist struggle in 1986 and regularly wrote political affairs columns for the Daily Mirror, Sunday Times, Virakesari, and other Tamil newspapers. In the late 1990s, Sivaram's sympathies began to swing toward the LTTE, and Sinhalese nationalists and other anti-LTTE groups regularly criticized him for LTTE partiality. On May 3, 2004 (ironically, World Press Freedom Day), 40 policemen raided Sivaram's home, purportedly searching for weapons. (The search yielded nothing.) In 2001 a grenade was thrown at his office in Batticaloa.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Sivaram's killing has sparked a fury of speculation about possible motives. In the past two weeks, he has published articles critical both of the LTTE's dissident Karuna faction as well as government coalition partner Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). His April 20 article entitled "Sleeping Tiger and Hidden Agendas" claimed that LTTE moles had infiltrated much of the Karuna faction. An April 13 piece blasted the JVP campaign against the proposed joint mechanism between the Government and LTTE for tsunami aid distribution as calculated to split its coalition

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partner, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), to the point of "terminal calamity." His opinion piece that appeared in the Daily Mirror just the day before his murder was even more pointed, claiming that the JVP met Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca during her April 19-20 visit to Sri Lanka (Ref B) expressly in order "to stop the SLFP from agreeing to the proposed joint mechanism for tsunami aid." The article went on to detail anti-US

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sentiment within the JVP, drawing heavily upon a meeting between the journalist and a JVP ideologue, who reportedly accused the U.S. of neocolonialist designs (allegedly perpetrated through USAID, its partner NGOs and tsunami relief) against Sri Lanka. The current JVP campaign against NGOs is an attempt to thwart these purported efforts, the article concluded.

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: Sivaram is the most prominent Tamil targeted since the LTTE's abortive attempt to assassinate Government Minister Douglas Devananda in July 2004. The murder will not only instill fear among journalists; it is also a scary reminder that perhaps the ghosts of the pre-ceasefire past--when such assassinations in Colombo were commonplace--are not yet safely behind us. It is too early to say with any authority who killed Sivaram; he was too well known and had too many enemies to limit the field of possible suspects. The ongoing tit-for-tat violence between the LTTE and its Karuna opponents makes the dissident faction a probable suspect. Pro-LTTE commentators are likely to posit, based on the site of his abduction (in front of a police

station) and the discovery of his corpse close to the heavily guarded Parliament building, some sinister connection and/or complicity from government security forces. Given Sivaram's recent columns on the joint mechanism--and mounting speculation that the Government will sign within the next two weeks--his assassination appears to be a direct attempt to derail prospects for the agreement.

ENTWISTLE